The Columbia River One Design (CROD): Everyman's Yacht of the Columbia

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(From articles produced by David Kanally on History with Heart)

Introduction: In the 1930s, as yachting on the Columbia River gained momentum, there was a desire for a sailboat that could unify the racing scene while remaining practical for families. The Columbia River Yachting Association (CRYA) envisioned a boat that was accessible, durable, and capable of meeting the challenges of the river's tides, sandbars, and shifting winds. Out of this vision came the Columbia River One Design—affectionately called the CROD.

CRUD Row at Portland Yacht Club (1940s)

Though only a dozen were ever built, the CRODs left an enduring mark on Pacific Northwest sailing, remembered today not only as competitive racers but as vessels woven deeply into family stories and local maritime culture.

Designing the CROD The CRYA approached naval architect Joseph M. Dyer in 1934 with a challenge: design an "everyman's boat" for the Columbia River. Their criteria were ambitious: - Reasonable cost - Simple enough for amateur or semi-professional builders - Comfortable accommodations for three or four people on weekend cruises - Auxiliary power for river conditions - A shoal draft to handle sandbars

Dyer's design evolved to a 28-foot sloop with an 8'10" beam and low freeboard. The hull featured a hard chine, allowing the boat to settle flat on sandbars, and a centerboard for shallow draft sailing (2'4" up, 5 feet down). Auxiliary power came from a 4-cylinder Universal engine, cruising at 6.5 knots.

Columbia River One Design, Hull #3 Aeolus *(Gods of the Wind), built in 1934 by the Astoria Marine Construction Company. A total of twelve boats were built, mainly in the 1930's and 1940's*

The interior was equally thoughtful: a drop-leaf table on the centerboard trunk, sliding transoms to form double berths, a compact galley, and a spacious cockpit. With this blend of practicality and modest performance, the CROD quickly became a Columbia River icon.

Racing and Recognition The first CRODs appeared in the mid-1930s, and by 1935 the Astoria Regatta featured hull #3 slightly in the lead—a powerful debut for the new class. Their reputation was cemented when legend has it that the first CROD sailed up the coast from Astoria and swept its class in the Pacific International Yachting

Association (PIYA) Regatta.

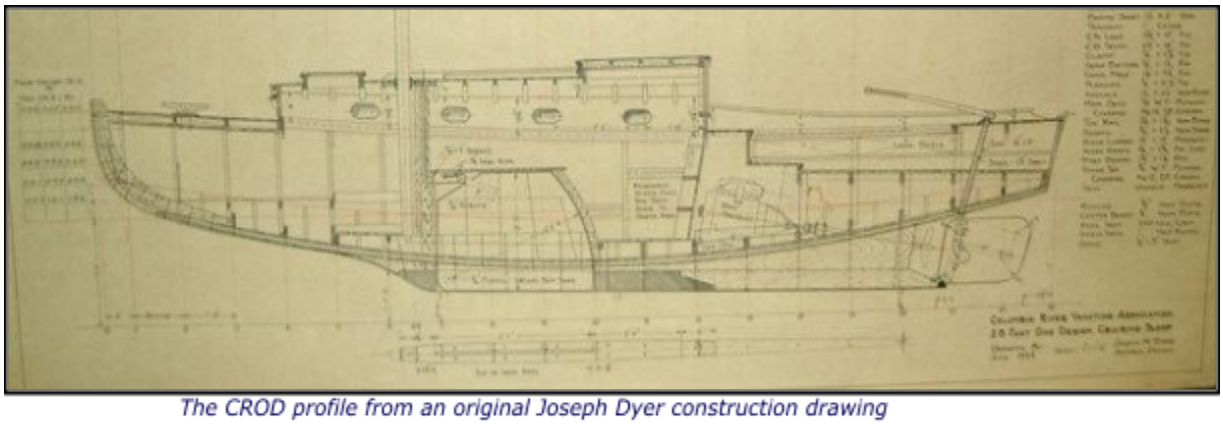
The CRODs became regulars at the Portland Yacht Club (PYC) and Astoria Yacht Club, with trophies from the 1930s attesting to their competitive presence. Through the 1940s, the sight of “CROD Row” at PYC, with multiple hulls lined up for racing, was a familiar emblem of the region’s sailing culture.

Owner Stories: A Fleet of Twelve Although just twelve hulls were built, each took on a distinctive identity. Their stories tell of regattas, restorations, family outings, and sometimes hard retirements.

Hull #1 – Cluaran (later Mistee) Launched in 1934, Hull #1 passed through many owners before being renamed Mistee. In the 1970s, DeVere and Billie Lindh sailed her in Puget Sound before donating her in 1991 to the Center for Wooden Boats in Seattle. Today, she is in storage at the Columbia River Maritime Museum, preserving the first of her class.

Hull #2 – Jean II Owned originally by Dean B. Webster, Commodore of PYC in 1939, Hull #2 underwent multiple name changes (Jeannie Sue, Delite, Sea Breeze, Sweet Lady) before being donated to CRMM. Like Hull #1, she rests in museum storage, an important survivor of the class.

Hull #3 – Aeolus Named after the Greek god of the winds, Hull #3 has perhaps the most storied history. Early on, she competed at the Astoria Regatta and later passed through many hands, including Walter Elliott and Dirk Winters. In the 1990s, she was restored by Astoria Marine Construction Company under David Fastabend’s guidance. She later traveled to Florida and Georgia, where she was retired. Her long journey illustrates both the endurance and fragility of these wooden classics.



The CROD profile from an original Joseph Dyer construction drawing

Hull #4 – Terry (later Diane and Mamook) Originally owned by J.C. Ainsworth in 1935, Hull #4 was later renamed Diane and famously graced the October 1941 cover of Pacific Motor Boat magazine, helmed by Gordon MacDonald during the Astoria Regatta. In later decades, she was called Mamook and owned by Jack Austin for 25 years. Today, she is under restoration after being transferred from the Center for Wooden Boats.

Hull #5 – Dorla (later Antiki) Launched in 1935, Dorla lived many lives under new names and owners. In 2010 she was reacquired and rechristened Dorla by Matthew Trent. Eventually retired, she now rests on land overlooking a lake in Oregon—a fittingly peaceful end for a veteran cruiser.

Hull #6 – Susan (later Spanker II) One of the most beloved CRODs, Hull #6 was sailed extensively by the Roberts family of Vancouver, WA. Their son Jay recalled night sailing adventures, dodging gillnets and barges, and wrestling with a stubborn 6-volt Gray Marine engine. Family friend C.S. Wetherell remembered ferrying picnickers across the Columbia and rewiring the boat after a near-disastrous short circuit. These anecdotes capture the CROD not just as a yacht but as a stage for family memories.

Hull #7 – Ginny (later Starlight) Launched in 1941, Hull #7's history is less well documented. Owned by Claude F. Butler as Starlight, her ultimate fate is uncertain.

Hull #8 – Betty Also built in 1941, Hull #8's ownership and status remain unknown, though she was once sailed by O. Isley.

Hull #9 – Evening Star Perhaps second only to Aeolus in fame, Hull #9 was owned by Ed DeKoning, who raced widely and even undertook Pacific passages. Later owners included Lawrence Goeckritz in the 1960s, whose daughter recalled roller-skate sails powered by makeshift kites. In the 1980s, Curtis Sluyter restored her extensively in Portland before selling her to the Devlin family in Olympia. Her story blends competitive success with deep family ties.

Tom Tom *on the beach of Maury Island in Washington State, 2016, prior to the start of restoration by Reed Spangler. As of 2018, she was back on the Columbia, on Puget Island with owner Gabrielle Stevens.*

Hull #10 – Tom Tom Built in 1945 and owned for a time by Joseph Dyer himself, Hull #10 later belonged to Dyer's son, Tom. In recent years, she has been relocated to Puget Island, Washington, for sailing and further repairs. Few CRODs have remained so close to their designer's family.

Hull #11 – Tamarack (later Deep Six and Cirrus) Built in 1950, Hull #11 had colorful ownership, including Col. Stan Kelly and later Jim Roberts as Cirrus. She was last known to be berthed at Tomahawk Island Marina in the mid-1980s.

Hull #12 – Legend (later Flossie) The last of the fleet, built in 1961 by William McPhearson, Hull #12 was later renamed Flossie. As of 2017, she was under restoration, with her Atomic 4 engine reportedly "running like a top." Photos as recent as 2018 show her still afloat, a hopeful reminder that some CRODs continue to endure.

Conclusion: The CROD Legacy from regatta victories to family picnics, from careful restorations to quiet retirements, the CROD fleet illustrates the Columbia River's blend of practicality, ambition, and community spirit. Though small in number, these boats embody a tradition of accessible yachting and wooden boat craftsmanship that resonates far beyond their dozen hulls.

Today, preserved examples in the Columbia River Maritime Museum and the Center for Wooden Boats ensure that the CROD's legacy is not forgotten. They are more than vessels; they are storytellers—of the people, clubs, and families who made the Columbia River a place where everyman's yacht could thrive.